

## A LOOK BACK

*The Journal and Letters of Captain Charles Bishop on the North-West Coast of America, in the Pacific and in New South Wales. 1794-1799.*

The Hakluyt Society, Second Series, No. CXXXI, 1966.

Cambridge, Published for the Hakluyt Society © at the University Press. 1967. Edited by Michael Roe.  
(Reproduced by permission of the Hakluyt Society.)

**E**aster Island bore at noon. North West by West distance 488 Leagues, it lies in  $27^{\circ} 4' S$  Lat: and  $109^{\circ} 46' W$  Longitude<sup>1</sup>

*Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup>:  $31^{\circ} 48' S$   $98^{\circ} 34' W$ , Variation  $8^{\circ} East$*

This last week: we have had remarkable steady breezes: with fair weather: and a smooth sea: and have made great progress towards Easter Island: where I mean to put in and try to procure Some Sweet Potatoes, Fowls &c. This last 24 hours we have made 180 miles distance and the Island bears now at noon:  $N 64^{\circ} West$  or  $NWbW \frac{3}{4} W$  distance 216 Leagues: the ships Company continue in good health: Attended Prayers this Morning: a Circumstance never neglected when the weather will admit – I am sorry to find our wood grows Short and we shall be under the necessity of Cooking once in two days as there is none to be procured at Easter Island. This gives me real concern, as the People has had tea sweetened with Treacle Since we have been out, for Breakfast: in the room of salt meat and which I believe has not contributed a little in preserving them from the appearance of the Scurvy: especially as they where almost continually wet beating round Cape Horn. I shall therefore endeavour to make one of the Isles of Los Majos which lies nearly in the Latitude of  $23^{\circ} North$  I am told are covered with wood, and lies in our Direct course towards North west coast of America:<sup>2</sup> we continue to see a Variety of sea Fowl, tho' the nearest known Land is Easter Isle–

*Saturday 28<sup>th</sup>:  $26^{\circ} 45' S$   $105^{\circ} 56' W$*

*Variation  $4^{\circ} Easterly$*

Until yesterday we have been gliding along for this last Fortnight under all Sail with moderate Breezes and fine Serene weather and a smooth Sea: winds, mostly in the  $N East$  and Expected to see Easter Island to day but to our Surprise as well as Mortification the wind veer'd round to  $NW$  and has blown Excessive hard with Severe Squalls of wind & rian nor is there at present any appearance of a Change: I am quite at a loss to account for this weather here in so low at latitude as I find by all the Journals of former navigators that they always found Easterly winds within the Latitude of  $30^{th}$ : degree,  $SE$ ,  $East$ , or  $NE$ . There is abundance of Sea Fowl hovering round us: small Gulls: Boatswains: Man of war Birds and Pentles.<sup>3</sup> Easter Island bore at noon West  $\frac{1}{2}$  South: distance 70 Leagues.

*March 1795. Monday 2<sup>d</sup>:  $27^{\circ} 03' S$   $108^{\circ} 18' W$*

*Variation  $4^{\circ} Easterly$*

*Tuesday 3<sup>d</sup>:*

Having run by the Log 59 miles West, since yesterday noon,

at daylight we saw the Land: Easter Island bearing west 12 or 14 Leagues distance: my Longitude agreeing Exactly with the Longitude of that Excellent navigator Captain Cook, who lays the Island down in  $109^{\circ}$  degrees  $46'$  minutes. It has but a Barren appearance: no wood: but is pretty good height above the level of the Sea: and there are Some Spotts of vegetation on it. We are approaching it fast with a fair wind and all Sail Set and Expect to anchor on the  $N. West$  side in the Afternoon: in my next I'll give a farther description of it –

Sailing along the North side of the Island two small canoes came off each carrying two men: they approach'd the ship with much caution, but as they perceived by our Presents of Iron Hoop, that we were Friends: one out of each canoe Jumpt overboard and Swam to the ship and was taken in. They gave their Presents to the Canoes as soon as we made them understand we where going to Anchor in Cooks Bay on the North west side<sup>4</sup>, and dismissed them to go on Shore themselves staying to accompany us round. These Canoes are of very mean construction: but display what their Genius is capable of if they had any trees of sufficient bigness to make them. These! consist of a great many small Pieces of wood Post, and to Prevent them from oversetting (for they are scarcely wide enough to set down in) they have two long spars secured to the Gunwalls which run out both on one side, and then have another about the Same length of the Canoe fastened to the Ends of the out riggers which floats along the Surface of the water: this being of light wood the bouyency of it prevents the Canoe from upsetting that way, and the weight of it, when out of the water, the other, but certainly impedes their Progress much.

As we passed along the land we observed a good many natives sitting out on the side of the hills which are covered with Plantations of Sweet Potatoes, Sugar Cane, Yams and other roots and near any of the villages they have one or two monuments standing on the Sea Shore facing them: these Seem to be intended to represent Human Figures: but done with a very coarse Idea, they stand some of them twenty feet high: and appear to be constructed of Stone: they are certainly Erected either as Monuments of some of their Worthies, or on Some Religious Idea.<sup>5</sup>

Passing round the  $NW$  end of the Island about a mile we came to the Bay where Cook anchored, and at the distance of a Mile and a Quarter from the Shore tried to get ground with & upwards of 90 fathems of line but could not effect it. The wind being off the land we beat in Shore under easy Sail, sounding frequently, and at 1 mile from the shore got 70 fathems water: the next cast 40, 30, 25, and at  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from Shore Anchored in 23 fathems: coarse sand & shells: the Prevailing winds here is  $S East$ ,  $East$  and  $N East$ , which blows off the Land: but the other day: we had a Gale of wind from the  $NW$ , when this roadstead must have been very dangerous from the vicinity of the land and the wind and sea being right in

*Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup>*

The ship being Secured at her Anchor and the Sails furled: with every thing in readiness to get under weight should the wind come in from the Sea, the watch set, the others retired to rest, when at two oclock in the morning about a dozen beauti-

ful young Women came swimming off naked as Nature introduces her children into the World. They came in with the greatest Saing froid, not in the least afraid: the Sight of so much beauty for it was a fine moon light night, did not fail to awaken in the minds of our Weather beaten crew, Sentiments kindred to love<sup>6</sup> – some of them content with the Presents they had received, a Knife, a Piece of Iron Hoop, or a looking Glass, Jumpt overboard and Swam on Shore with the news: daylight no sooner appeared than off they came – men, Women, Boys and Girls, the Ship was surrounded with beauties. These would come on board, stay a little time, RECEIVE A PRESENT and away overboard to refresh themselves, for when they Staid long the motion of the ship would make them sick – the men brought off a good many red yams, and Bananoes which was mostly bought for short Pieces of Iron Hoop, but brought but few Sweet Potatoes, and no Fowls, though offered the ENORMOUS SUM of two twopenny Knives for each –

In the evening having procured but little VEGETABLE refreshments, and it being now the full of the Moon, fearing a Change of weather, we got underweigh and Stood off to Sea intending to come in in the Morning and try the Effect of another days trade – when having got off about five miles, two young men who had Expressed a desire to accompany us to 'BRITTANNIE' on Seeing the Ship withdraw from their Native Land, came aft and in a most Expressive and Petious manner requested me to tack the Ship and land them amongst their Friends again: this I did, the weather looking fair, and Anchored about 8 oclock in the Same Place we had before.

#### Thursday 5<sup>th</sup>

In the Morning as before they came off, the Men brought to day a good many fine Sweet Potatoes and we procured nearly half of Ton of them but only three Fowls: I believe these had a Sort of religious Interdiction, called Tabou'ee as we even at least offerd a Hatchett for one which was not a Sufficient inducement, and they where bought here in Plenty in 1793 for a foot of Iron Hoop – In the morning we hoisted out the wale Boat and I went close in Shore: but could not (if inclined to, land) effect it, the Surf beat so hard upon the Rocks and there is no beach. In the evening we got underweigh and made all sail for the North west coast of America –

Situated on the Bosom of the great South sea or Pacific ocean 500 Leagues from any known Land, is a small Spott of Earth about twenty five or Thirty miles in circumference. It seems originally to have been discovered by one Davis and Called after his Name Davis' Land, but at that time Navigation was very imperfect and he had placed it far out of its real Situation. It was reserved for the Illustrious Cook to adjust this business, who touch'd here in March 1772 and renamed it Easter Island. It seems he landed with a Party of arm'd men and travaersed o'er the island, but the natives, fearful he would Seize Some of their Women, from their not seeing any on board the Ship, and so many of the other sex together, hid them away, and as I am informed for I have not read that voyage, he did not see one Female<sup>7</sup> – it is interspersed with hills and vallies, the highest from 6 to 8 hundred feet above the level of the Sea. The Natives seem numerous and we compute them from 1500 to 2000<sup>8</sup> –, their houses resemble so many

large Beehives the front describing the third of a Circle and from their being so near the surface I conclude they must be hollowed out some depth in the Earth similar to what I have Seen on the coast of Africa, the Entrence is right in the center of the Front and seems to Project like a Porch two or three Feet beyond it. They are composed of reeds such as the Coopers use of which they have abundance – it would have given me great pleasure to have been able to land amongst them with safty, the sides of the hills and vallies are covered with vegetation, and we observed two very clear Runs of water pouring over the Rocks –

The men of Easter Island are of a middling statue and rather slender and do not appear very strong. They possess in general an open countenance with Black eyes, hair short, and most of them wore their Beards, but this latter I believe is from necessity, as they seemed much Pleased to be shaved by our people. Both men and Women are curiously tattooed about the face thighs and Arms in various figures, of flying Griffins, Fish, human Faces, Stripes &c – I observed on Shore all the People where cloathed from the Sholders to the Ankles with a kind of white matting composed of the Rind of the Plantane or Palm trees and only those who swam off where naked, men women, and Children. The women, indeed had a string tied round the waist and Some loose Rushes brought round between their legs – when the Ship Jenny of Bristol touch'd here in 1793 they where so given to thieving that they would Snatch the hatt off their heads, a knife out of their hands and away over board with it. At that time they did not know the use of Fire arms. That ship has touch'd here twice since<sup>9</sup>, or some others whose crews may not have been so humane: for on one of them taking up a knife which was lying on deck and jumped overboard, I had observed him and got a Pistol, without intention of firing it near him, he immediately held the Knife up in his hand and swam back with it, at the same time an old man (I believe his Father) held my hand making Signs not to fire, throwing himself down on deck and imitating a Person dying. Hence I fear some ship has taught these children of nature a severe lesson, indeed they did not openly Attempt to Steal any thing, and if they had I could not in my heart have considered it a Crime in them, cut off as they are from the world. Every thing they see in us, is a Rare novelty, and one cannot wonder at their desire to retain some mark as a memorial of having been visited by so strange a People as they must consider us to be. The only things we lost was a Cooks Axe and Saw which through the carelessness of the Cook had been left in their way and they got off with them without being observed by any one.

These Young women who came on board, had in general either a Father, Husband or Brother attending them, who for the Sake of the Presents of Handkerchiefs or cloaths the Sailors would give them urged them (some times apparently against their own inclinations) to accompany them below – I have seen a variety of Females on the coast of Africa and amongst the Moors, but never so generally well Formed. Their Limbs 'harmonious swell'd by natures FINEST hand'<sup>10</sup> exhibited a Figure equal to the finest paintings of Italy, with a cheerful open countenance, long Black hair, sparkling Black Eyes and teeth, that rivals Idea – the Sun has shed his influence o'er their Skins which in the women, who are considera-

bly fairer than the men, is of a Bright orange or indeed fairer – resembling a dark coloured Straw. Some of them where painted a little with a Reddish ocre, over the Forehead. Both men and women seem'd very fond of a little Boy I have under my Care, (Son of my Late Captain – John Learne) who is a fine round face chubby Boy, about 10 years of age.<sup>11</sup> They solicited me often to let him go on Shore, in vain. At one time they where about stealing them, two men being ready to receive him in the water and two of the Girls had got him in their arms going to let him down the Side, when the boys cries call'd our attention and prevented them. Not, if they had got him in the water, they could have made off with him, for our boat would have soon have overtaken them. Upon this defeat one of the Women took him in her arms and gave him her Breast, casting a look of so benign and Gentle a description that I am well persuaded they would have taken care of him, and that it was not, for the unkind supposition of their being cannibals suggested by some of the Crew, that they wished to have him onshore. In confirmation of this Idea I observed they had not a weapon, or a Scar or a spot or Blemish on their Skins; and if they where cannibals they would certainly have wars, which I believe is not the case.<sup>12</sup> I Fancy their food consists of Roots, they have some Fowls and there is Fish round the Islands, they have very fine fishing netts made of Grass, thir fish hook is of Bone.

Of their language, our short stay prohibited us from aquirng much knowledge. Pe'hee, signifies Friend – new'ee, Big – nid'ee, little – mow'ee, to ly down, sleep – mo'ae, Fowls – Etta'oea, Knife – Ear'ee, chief &c.

The natives when they swim off, tie up a Bundle of Coopers Rushes in the same form I have seen them in England, which they place under them with the peaked end out of the water. This bears them up so that they have only the toil of making way through the water, which they Seem to do with Great ease. These Bundles I believe are only intended to support them along side the Ship, where they Stay sometimes four hours for I observed they often threw them away when going for the Shore.

Adieu! Ye happy Race! May the Gentleness of our Polished nations still possess your Breasts, untainted with our Crimes, we go from you to the Close dark savage of America.

In the following leaf I have attempted to represent these People as they came on board. My Colours are Bad as may be seen in the Figure of the Man.<sup>13</sup> I forbear daubing with them the Woman. The original lives in my mind superior to any ability I have to represent it. She was the daughter of an Old man, who either from his age or situation seem'd to claim a particular respect from the rest, and was in consequence attended to by me, and I found it highly Gratifying to him, as well as service to us, to appoint him as Trade Man, Giving him Several presents, trifling to us but of intimate value to him.<sup>14</sup> Among the rest I gave him a large Brass Dogs collar which he put about his neck, much delighted. His interest taught him to instruct his daughter to be attentive to me – she danced, sang and made use of evry art her confined ability was capable of to please, nor was it in vain. I gave her a White

Shirt, and while putting it on her she stole the Knif out of my Pockett, this I could not prevent tho' I perceived it, but as it was of value to me, I sent one of the People with a trade Knife to give it her in the room, when she pulled it out, and with a laugh gave it up. She staid on board till we where under weigh. I laughing askd her to accompany us to Brittanee, she pointed to her Father and they Both jumped overboard and made for the Shore, without staying for the Presents I had intended for them – if I am not mistaken her name is Te'ree having heard her Father make use of the word several times when speaking to her –

## FOOTNOTES

BY MICHAEL ROE

<sup>1</sup> Actually at 27° 05' S; 109° 20' W.

<sup>2</sup> As Bishop was to find, the isles of Los Majos did not exist ... Their Spanish 'discoverer' had misplaced either the Sandwich or the Revilla Gigedo Islands, which latter lie between 18° 20' – 19° 20' N, 110° 45' – 114° 50' W. R. A. Skelton (British Museum) suggests that Bishop may have been using the 'chart, containing the Coasts of California, New Albion... and Islands dispersed over the Pacific Ocean to the North of the Line', by John Green (London, 1753 and many later editions).

<sup>3</sup> Petrels.

<sup>4</sup> Hanga Roa Bay.

<sup>5</sup> Knowledge as to the monuments' function remains at about this point.

<sup>6</sup> Bishop or his earlier editor here scored out some twenty words.

<sup>7</sup> This was an exaggeration.

<sup>8</sup> Cook estimated 6-7000; Bishop was more accurate, but probably still under the mark.

<sup>9</sup> The *Jenny* had touched twice not since 1793, but since 1791 or early 1792, i.e. first on her homeward run from that voyage and again outward bound in 1793-4. Bishop's '1793' probably should read '1792'.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted from James Thomson, 'Summer'. (Bishop's emphasis).

<sup>11</sup> The modern mind gawks at Bishop carrying this passenger whose name, and only his name, appears but briefly throughout the whole story.

<sup>12</sup> The Islanders engaged in both war and cannibalism, the latter sometimes the result of 'a simple liking for human flesh that could impel a man to kill for no other reason than his desire for fresh meat' (A. Métraux, *Easter Island*, London 1957:103. In this light even the wet-nursing of chubby young Learne can appear sinister.

<sup>13</sup> The sketches show head and torso of the two figures. They are very weak.

<sup>14</sup> On the effective use of a middle-man depends much on the success of trade with primitive (and not only primitive) peoples everywhere. Bishop was very conscious of this.